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Letter dated 4 March 2008 from the Chargé d'affaires a.i. of the Permanent Mission of Slovakia to the United Nations addressed to the President of the General Assembly

I have the honour to inform you that the Government of the Slovak Republic has decided to present its candidature for the Human Rights Council for the term 2008-2011 at the elections to be held during the sixty-second session of the General Assembly in May 2008.

In this respect, please find attached herewith the voluntary pledges and commitments of the Slovak Republic in the area of human rights, prepared in accordance with General Assembly resolution 60/251 (see annex).

I request that the present letter and its annex be circulated as a document of the General Assembly under agenda item 113 (d).

(*Signed*) Michal **Mlynár**
Chargé d'affaires a.i.

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Annex to the letter dated 4 March 2008 from the Chargé d'affaires a.i. of the Permanent Mission of Slovakia to the United Nations addressed to the President of the General Assembly

Slovakia's voluntary pledges and commitments

The Slovak Republic is fully committed to the universal promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms. Since its establishment in 1993 the Slovak Republic has been a strong defender of compliance with the objectives and principles of the Charter of the United Nations in the area of human rights, the equality of large and small nations, the implementation of international norms and standards arising from the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other international documents.

Human rights protection, both at the regional and global levels, is an essential component of Slovak foreign policy. As a non-permanent member of the Security Council in the period 2006-2007, the Slovak Republic was supporting the creation of the Human Rights Council in order to strengthen human rights protection mechanisms within the United Nations. Slovakia considers compliance with human rights, the principles of good governance and the rule of law essential for the prevention of open crises and conflicts.

The Slovak Republic has presented its candidacy for membership of the Human Rights Council for the period 2008-2011, with its main ambition being to play a positive and constructive role in the development and protection of human rights in the world. Slovakia was never a member of the former Commission on Human Rights and has not served in the current Council so far. Slovakia firmly believes that a fair rotation of Council members is crucial. If elected to the Council, Slovakia is determined to actively engage in its activities and contribute to the strengthening of the Council's position in the United Nations hierarchy.

General Assembly resolution 60/251 provides the Human Rights Council with the means necessary for the assessment of human rights issues and for decision-making. The Council should promptly respond to cases of gross and systematic violations of human rights and examine appropriate means of redress. Recommendations made by the Council should focus on searching for practical solutions and result in specific improvements to be carried out in cooperation with other United Nations bodies, international organizations and affected countries.

Bearing in mind that human rights are indivisible, interrelated and interdependent, the Slovak Republic promotes the principle of equality of civil, political, economic, cultural and social rights, including the right to development. In this context the Slovak Republic pays special attention to the issues of social inclusion, the elimination of social and cultural prejudice and the promotion of racial and religious tolerance.

Stressing the importance of the conclusions of the Millennium Summit held in 2000 and the Millennium Development Goals, the Slovak Republic deems it necessary to pay due attention to the development of good governance, the rule of law and the protection of vulnerable and marginalized groups, including women, children, elderly people, the disabled and persons belonging to national minorities and ethnic groups.

The Slovak Republic is a party to nearly all international legal instruments in the area of human rights protection and humanitarian law. Under Article 7(5) of the Constitution of the Slovak Republic, international treaties on human rights and fundamental freedoms prevail over Slovak laws and apply directly, as "self-executing treaties".

Slovakia is a party to the following six core United Nations human rights treaties and their optional protocols:

- International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and its two Optional Protocols
- International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights
- Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment
- International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination
- Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and its Optional Protocol
- Convention on the Rights of the Child and its two Optional Protocols

Upon ratification of the aforementioned treaties, the Slovak Republic did not make any reservations to the accepted commitments. In September 2007 Slovakia signed the two new crucial international human rights instruments — the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, including its Optional Protocol.

The Slovak Republic is a party to many other treaties on human rights and international humanitarian and criminal law, including the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, four Geneva Conventions and their three Additional Protocols and the relevant Council of Europe human rights treaties.

The Slovak Republic fully cooperates with the Council's special procedures, and was one of the first countries to extend a standing invitation for special procedures missions, as early as March 2001.

Emphasizing the importance of the **international** protection of human rights, the Slovak Republic hereby presents the following **voluntary pledges and commitments**. It will:

- Take an active part in activities and negotiations of the Council in order to promote the universal respect for all human rights and fundamental freedoms for all
- Enhance genuine dialogue and cooperation among all Member States of the Council in order to achieve real progress in human rights protection on the ground
- Contribute to the consolidation of the new Council mechanisms, including the system of special procedures, the complaint procedure and the Advisory Committee

- Actively engage in the universal periodic review, which Slovakia would like to see developed as a cooperative and inclusive process whose results would include constructive recommendations for Member States, adopted on the principle of equal treatment and identifying areas where there is room for capacity-building and technical assistance
- Uphold the highest human rights standards and fully cooperate with the Council and its bodies, affirming the validity of its standing invitation to the special procedures mandate-holders
- Cooperate with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and support its activities
- Promote cooperation between the government sector and civil society, by making use of the involvement of non-governmental organizations in the Council's activities
- Advocate universal ratification of the United Nations human rights treaties and actively encourage third countries to become parties to the treaties if they have not yet done so
- Participate in the preparation of new international norms and instruments in the field of human rights, including improvements in the functioning of the existing mechanisms
- Cooperate with the United Nations treaty bodies and strive for a timely submission of national periodic reports concerning those treaties by which it is bound
- Complete, during its membership in the Council, the ratification process related to the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
- Share its experience with the building of democratic structures and human rights institutions and transfer its know-how in this field to other transforming countries that so wish

The Slovak Republic has recently gone through profound changes related to the restoration of its democratic character and during this period has built a high-quality system of human rights protection at the national level. In connection with the establishment of a sovereign State in 1993, legal guarantees concerning the protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms were securely embedded in the Constitution of the Slovak Republic.

A broad legislative and institutional framework for the protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms for all citizens is currently in place in Slovakia. The Constitution of the Slovak Republic stipulates that all people in its territory are free and equal in their dignity and rights. The fundamental rights and freedoms are guaranteed in Slovakia to all individuals irrespective of their different status specified under the Constitution.

At the Government level, human rights issues fall within the competence of the Deputy Prime Minister for the Knowledge Society, European Affairs, Human Rights and Minorities. The Council of the Government for National Minorities and Ethnic Groups acts as an advisory body to the Government on national minority

policy issues and the implementation of international treaties. In order to establish an effective institutional framework to address the problems of the Roma minority, the position of Government Plenipotentiary for Roma Communities was created in 1999. At the parliamentary level, human rights issues are addressed by the Parliamentary Committee for Human Rights, Nationalities and the Status of Women, which, among other things, reviews the compliance of draft legislation with constitutional provisions and international commitments.

By establishing an Ombudsman's office, with the title "Public Defender of Rights", Slovakia put in place an independent control mechanism to monitor human rights compliance. Already during its first five-year term, the Office of the Public Defender of Rights proved itself an effective instrument of non-judicial oversight of compliance with fundamental rights and freedoms of natural and legal persons with regard to actions, decisions or inaction by the authorities of public administration.

In 1993, the Slovak National Centre for Human Rights was established, having the status of a national human rights institution within the United Nations. The Centre is competent, among other things, to provide legal assistance to victims of discrimination and intolerance; therefore it enjoys within the European Union the status of a specialized anti-discrimination institution, or so-called Equality Body.

With a view to strengthening the protection of human rights at **the national level**, the Slovak Republic hereby presents the following **voluntary pledges and commitments**. It will:

- Further develop its institutional framework and specific national policies focused on the protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms, building on the existing expertise of Government bodies, non-governmental organizations and other stakeholders
- Continue implementing its Action Plan for the Prevention of All Forms of Discrimination, Racism, Xenophobia and Intolerance in order to build a tolerant and democratic State, promote a multicultural society and prevent discrimination in all forms
- Strengthen the institutional and actual protection of the rights of children and women in society, including the preparation of specific programmes for this purpose
- Prepare a national action plan for children, in order to meet the recommendations made by the relevant United Nations treaty body
- Build effective mechanisms to prevent and suppress human trafficking and carry on with the tasks specified in the National Action Plan to Combat Trafficking in Human Beings
- Increase the volume of its official development assistance provided to priority countries, including assistance through projects focused on the building of democratic institutions and the protection of human rights
- Inform the general public about activities undertaken by international bodies in the field of human rights and about their assessment of the human rights situation in the Slovak Republic (by publishing the results of the presentation of periodical reports before treaty bodies, etc.)

- **Support activities of independent institutions, in particular the Public Defender of Rights and the Slovak National Centre for Human Rights, and further target their activities in addressing concrete problems of our citizens, eliminating unequal treatment and discrimination, as well as educating the public about human rights issues**